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Assessing the effectiveness of United Nations public information products and activities: the results of a three-year evaluation project

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The comprehensive three-year review of its major product and service lines, conducted in collaboration with the Office of Internal Oversight Services, has enabled the Department of Public Information to ensure that a culture of evaluation permeates the full range of its work. The Department is now in a better position to measure the effectiveness of its work and, on that basis, to strategically communicate the activities and concerns of the Organization with the aim of achieving the greatest public impact. To that end, the Department will continue to strive to (a) increase worldwide access to United Nations public information products and services; (b) meet the needs of its target audiences by improving the relevance, usefulness and quality of its work; and (c) promote an enhanced understanding of the work of the Organization. The present report summarizes the key findings and final outcome of the systematic evaluation of the activities conducted by the Department of Public Information.

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I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 17 of its resolution 57/300, the General Assembly welcomed the intention of the Secretary-General to undertake, over a three-year period, a systematic evaluation of the activities of the Department of Public Information, with assistance from the Office of Internal Oversight Services. In the same paragraph, the Secretary-General was requested to report thereon to the Committee on Information on progress made in that regard. Accordingly, beginning in 2003, the Secretary-General's annual reports on the reorientation of the Department and on questions relating to information have included data related to the gradual implementation of the said evaluation project.

2. In paragraph 10 of its resolution 60/109 B, the General Assembly acknowledged the conclusion of the three-year collaborative project between the DPI and the Office of Internal Oversight Services, and requested the Secretary-General to report thereon to the Committee on Information at its twenty-eighth session. The present report is submitted in compliance with that request.

II. Background

3. In line with the reform programme of the Secretary-General, a comprehensive review of the management and operations of the Department was carried out in 2002 by an external consultancy firm. This allowed the Department to clarify its purposes and to enhance its overall effectiveness and efficiency, resulting in a new operating model and mission statement.

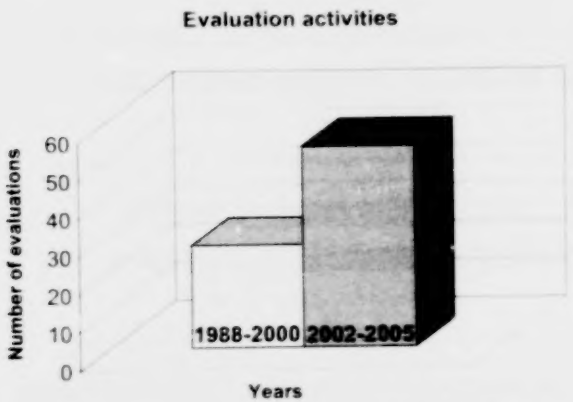
4. One of the critical recommendations of the external consultant was to institutionalize a culture of evaluation through an annual programme impact review. The Department sought the assistance of the Office of Internal Oversight Services in establishing and refining the review process over a three-year period. The overall objective of the annual programme impact review is to ensure the systematic evaluation of the impact of the main product and service lines of the Department.

5. Based on a methodological framework and an action plan proposed by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the said evaluation was undertaken in a three-phased approach. The first phase involved the conceptualization and implementation of the framework of the annual programme impact review, with a focus on the self-evaluation of programme effectiveness: departmental goals were identified and aligned with divisional objectives, and key programmes and activities were selected for impact analysis on an annual basis. The second phase entailed the adjustment of the scope of the impact review through an analysis of lessons learned. The final step encompassed designing templates for use across divisions of the Department of Public Information to standardize self-evaluation work plans and internal reporting on outcomes to the head of the Department. The Office of Internal Oversight Services facilitated the year-end "stocktaking" sessions. Collaboration with the Office was instrumental in enabling the Department to move forward in its efforts to institutionalize a culture of evaluation at all levels of its staff and management.

III. Promoting a "culture of evaluation"

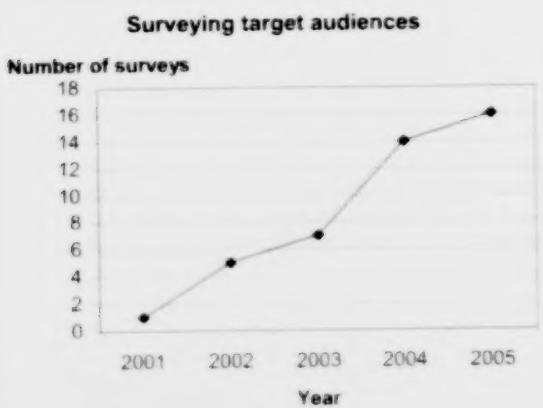
6. Since its inception in 2001, the Department has always made the creation of a culture of evaluation a cornerstone of its reorientation process. By institutionalizing systematic assessment through the annual programme impact review, the Department has sought to make self-evaluation an integral part of the daily work of programme managers. Designed as an internal mechanism for performance management, the impact review has allowed managers to determine what works and what does not, and to feed that information back into programme planning on an ongoing basis. Systematic evaluation activities have doubled since the new evaluation process has been introduced, and the number of surveys have risen four-fold (see figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1



NB. The Department of Public Information conducted its first audience research study in 1988.

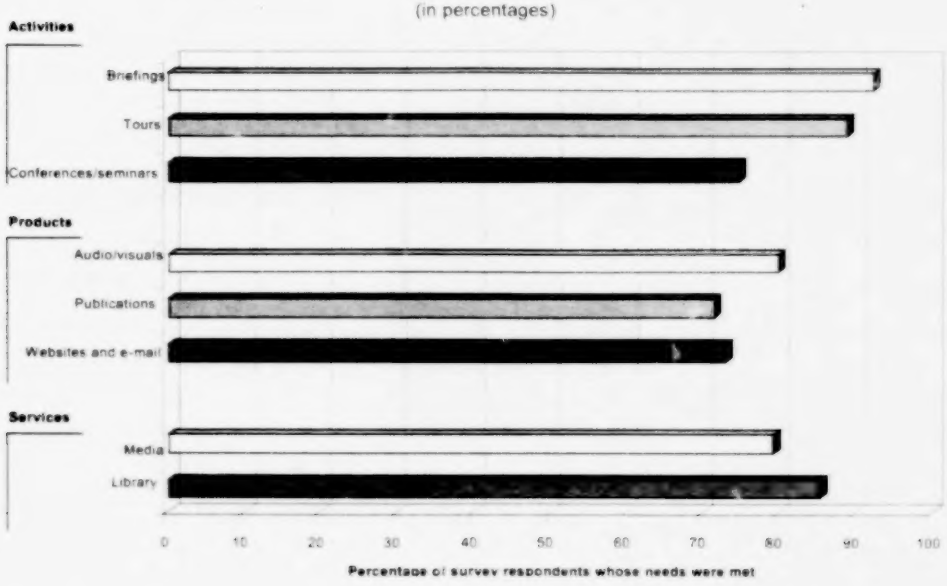
Figure 2



7. A major institutional shift has resulted in a proliferation of user surveys, enabling the Department to place more emphasis on the alignment of its work with the needs of its target audiences. Overall, the surveys demonstrate that the Department has managed to meet the demands of, on average, 80 per cent of its target audiences, in terms of usefulness, relevance and quality of Department products, activities and services (see figure 3).

Figure 3

Usefulness, relevance and quality of Department activities, products and services, 2002-2005



8. The increase in systematic assessment is also the direct result of the Department's efforts to ensure extensive training in audience research and evaluation techniques: 90 per cent of its programme managers and two thirds of professional staff at Headquarters have attended one or more training workshops. While the Department continues to face considerable challenges in ensuring adequate training for staff in the field, the importance of training in promoting a culture of evaluation was amply demonstrated by a 2005 training programme held for United Nations information centres in sub-Saharan Africa. As a result of the evaluation workshop, twice as many evaluation projects were undertaken by centres in sub-Saharan Africa, as compared to United Nations information centres in all other regions.

IV. Assessing impact

9. The Department aims to support the substantive purposes of the United Nations by strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the Organization to the outside world in order to achieve the greatest public impact. To this end, the Department continually strives to (a) increase worldwide access to United Nations public information products and services; (b) meet the needs of its target audiences by improving the relevance, usefulness and quality of its work; and (c) promote greater understanding of the work of the Organization. Measuring the effectiveness of its work, therefore, requires focusing on these three objectives.

10. Determining the reach of United Nations information products and services through the collection of audience statistics remains the foundation for measuring the effectiveness of the work of the Department of Public Information. Different media have varying penetration by region and audience group (see figures 4 and 5) and therefore serve as complementary means to ensure the broadest possible access to information on United Nations activities.

Figure 4

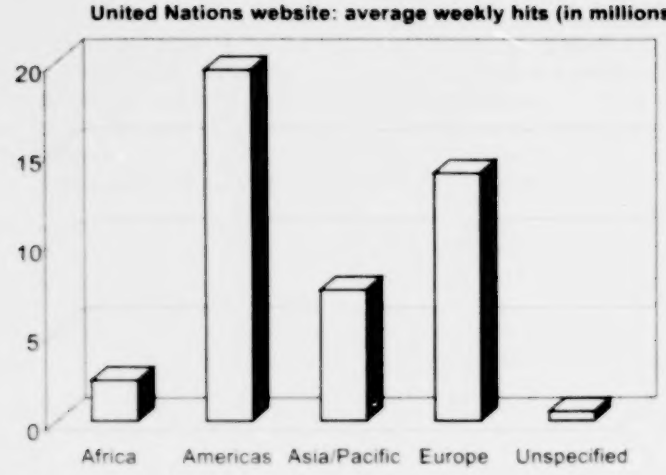
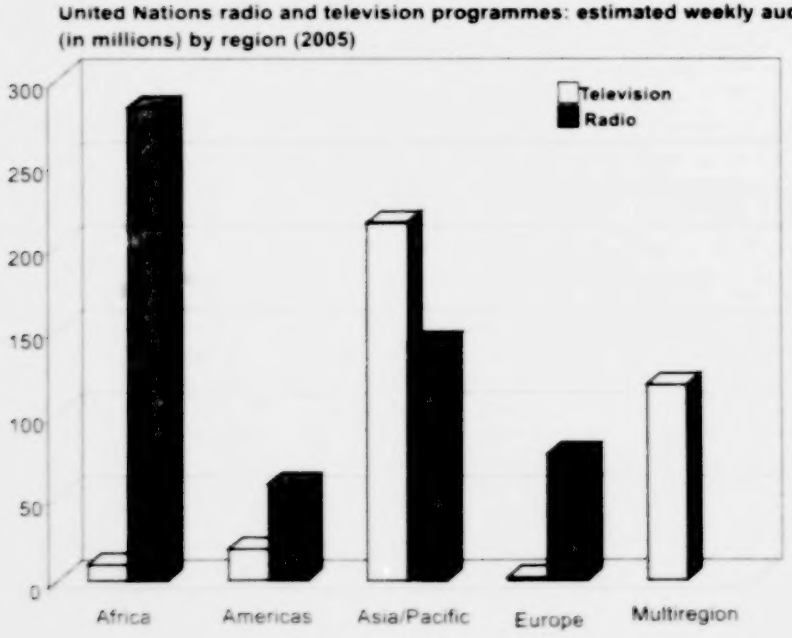


Figure 5



11. Additionally, the Department attempts to answer questions about the quality of its programmes and their usage through target audience research and user feedback. This method of gathering feedback allows the Department to determine a more precise profile of its audiences, a better understanding of their needs and, to some extent (especially in the case of "captive audiences"), an indication of how their understanding of the United Nations and its work has changed.

12. Lastly, the ultimate measurement of impact, defined as changes in attitude and social behaviour (see figure 6), cannot be addressed without tracking global public opinion on the Organization as a whole. At this level it is no longer possible to separate individual communication products and activities, but rather it is their overall effect and the work of the Organization in its entirety that is assessed. The Department of Public Information developed a programme to conduct global public opinion surveys in the late 1980s, but owing to budget constraints, the programme was ended in the early 1990s. Currently, data from public opinion polls are accessible to the Department only when they are made available on a pro bono basis.

Figure 6

Assessing the impact of public information and communications

V. Major findings

13. The reorientation process, undertaken in 2002, allowed the Department of Public Information to begin working in four main strategic directions: to create a culture of communication through client orientation; to integrate new technologies into all aspects of its work; to make full use of the resources available throughout the United Nations system by improving the coordination of public information

activities; and to strengthen partnerships to maximize global outreach. Underlying these strategic directions was the Department's commitment to assessing the results of its work and ensuring accountability through a culture of evaluation. On the basis of the three-year review of its main product and service lines, the Department has identified a set of key findings as they correspond to the strategic directions. Details on the findings follow in section VI below.

Culture of communication: a client approach

14. Feedback from journalists, as well as results of media analyses, have shown that simple and concrete messages have the greatest impact. They are most likely to be picked up and are easily translatable by the United Nations information centres, both linguistically and in terms of adaptation to a local context. By way of example, the promotion of complex and overlapping objectives, such as the eight Millennium Development Goals, makes it exceptionally challenging to ensure adequate attention by media worldwide. Client departments that provide a clear articulation of the results of their work support the Department's efforts to create an informed understanding of the United Nations. Therefore, in order to foster a culture of communication, the Department will work closely with client departments to help them refine and simplify their messages.

Increased efficiency through new technologies

15. The Department needs to further prioritize ways of increasing the access of audiences worldwide to its high-impact programmes. While human contact, such as direct personal interaction at events, is invaluable, it is not practicable to reach millions in that manner. It is therefore necessary to maximize the participation of remote audiences through the use of new technologies, such as webcasts and interactive websites, which are crucial for ensuring the widest possible inclusion of audiences worldwide. To that end, the Department has implemented interactive technologies in its effort to expand the reach of such programmes as the annual non-governmental organization conference or the seminar series on the theme "Unlearning intolerance".

16. Moreover, analyses of findings across the Department have reconfirmed the importance of students and educators as a primary user group of United Nations communications products, a trend expected to continue, in the light of the high level of digital literacy among young people. Therefore, the Department will strive to make the content and format of the United Nations website as accessible as possible to young audiences.

United Nations system-wide coordination

17. Given the fact that crises dominate the 24-hour news cycle, in order to maintain the focus on issues of persistent importance, United Nations communicators must proactively attempt to "change the conversation". System-wide coordination has promoted such initiatives as the "Ten stories the world should hear more about", launched by the Department two years ago, which represent a step in the right direction in terms of refocusing media attention on issues of international concern. The Department will implement more such initiatives in a coordinated manner, and incorporate the whole range of media tools available to it into them.

Partnerships

18. Insufficient budgetary resources have forced the Department to rely increasingly on partnerships in order to implement new activities, particularly those related to educators and youth. While the Department continues to benefit from partnerships on a pro bono basis, including to help build evaluation capacities and to provide occasional polling data, it should lead the way in ensuring systematic evaluation and polling in the United Nations system. The Department will, therefore, explore ways in which to work more closely with alternative funding sources, including through the use of trust funds, in order to supplement budgetary allocations and to increase flexibility in programme planning.

VI. Fulfilling the renewed mission of the Department of Public Information: goal-oriented evaluations

A. Reach

19. One of the Department's central goals is to reach target audiences worldwide with the Organization's messages through key intermediaries such as the media, non-governmental organizations and educational institutions. This entails ensuring the creation and widest possible and timely distribution of news and information products on the priorities and activities of the United Nations. Therefore, the Department consistently aims to increase access of the global public to its products and activities.

20. Over the past three years, the growth and reach of key products of the Department of Public Information have included a 50 per cent increase in the subscribers to the United Nations News Centre e-mail service, and in the readership of the *UN Chronicle* print and online magazine. Newer activities have exhibited even sharper increases in reach. For example, the interactive website of the NGO annual conference witnessed a more than forty-fold increase in participants. Growth is not attributed solely to the use of new technologies, as seen by the estimated doubling of the number of radio listeners (see table).

Expanded reach of Department of Public Information products (2003-2005)

Selected Department products	*2003*	*2004*	*2005*
Annual conference of non-governmental organizations (interactive website participants)	520	1 562	21 000
News centre e-mail service (subscribers)	22 053	33 500	44 217
Guided tours (visitors)	323 169	360 157	412 042
UN Chronicle (readership, print and online)	384 620	439 420	716 997
United Nations Radio (estimated number of listeners)	133 263 150	n/a	299 095 000

B. Meeting audience needs

Radio/television

21. A survey of broadcasters of United Nations radio and television programmes was conducted to ascertain target audience needs. Conducted by more than 200 radio stations and 60 television stations, the survey determined that Department of Public Information programmes reach a weekly estimated audience of 600 million, equally divided between television and radio. Overall, the programmes are well received, considered to be of high quality and are frequently used. This represented more than double the reach estimated in 2003 when a similar survey was conducted. The growth was due, in part, to a more than 20 per cent increase in the number of partner stations. The radio language units with the most notable expansion in audience size were actively involved in promoting their own programmes. Survey results indicate that UNIFEED, a daily satellite feed of United Nations video footage, is being used by several major broadcasters, including Sky News and China Central Television. More than 97 per cent of the audience reach of two major Department television programmes is achieved by the transmission of *UN in Action*, with an estimated audience of 292 million, and *World Chronicle*, with an audience reach in all regions of approximately 8 million. Regarding *UN in Action* (a series of short television features), the survey found that a sizeable audience exists, but only some of the spots pertaining directly to specific regions are used. The survey also revealed that many broadcasters did not use the narration provided for these television programmes; in some languages, the translated narration was not used at all. This suggests the need to review the usefulness of these translations.

Annual conference of non-governmental organizations

22. The annual Department of Public Information/non-governmental organization conference, which is the premier event for the Department at Headquarters, is physically accessible only to a limited audience due to logistical and security considerations. The Department has been consistently surveying conference participants for many years because their presence at Headquarters is an important opportunity to elicit audience feedback. In the surveys, representatives of non-governmental organizations have long expressed their wish for enhanced participation. In order to expand the reach of the conference, a new interactive website was set up to allow the plenary sessions to be webcast. Subsequently, further suggestions elicited from non-governmental organization participants led to the improvement of the dedicated interactive conference website. At the conference in 2005, in addition to information and resources for participants and journalists, the website offered an online discussion forum. Online participants were able to interact with each other and ask panel speakers questions in real time. The result of the improvements was an expansion of audience size to 21,000 individuals from over 124 countries — a ten-fold increase over the previous conference.

News Centre e-mail service

23. Since April 2002, when its e-mail news service was first launched, the subscriber base of the News Centre has grown to 43,500 recipients. The News Centre has been praised as an important source of news on the United Nations. Recent user feedback has confirmed the need to significantly upgrade customization features, including the option to select stories on specific issues and geographical

regions, and to suspend subscription temporarily. It has also suggested ways of improving the service's format and delivery mechanism, and demonstrated users' interest in expanding the range of products that could be made available as an option. A substantial number of respondents, for instance, expressed interest in receiving links to audio-visual products, fact sheets on issues in the news, as well as interviews and press articles by the Secretary-General and senior United Nations officials. In addition, 25 per cent of respondents have provided content- and presentation-related comments that will be taken into account by the Department in its ongoing efforts to enhance the United Nations News Centre site and its e-mail service.

United Nations website

24. The United Nations website is the primary gateway through which audiences can have access to information about the United Nations; as such, it acts as a natural nexus for the Organization to effectively extend its reach to worldwide audiences. Given the size and complexity of the site, the search function, with an average of over 500,000 searches per month, is a primary navigation tool. The evaluation of the United Nations website concentrated on an analysis of the difficulties that users encountered in finding information. Its purpose was to improve accessibility to requested material and thereby increase the site's overall efficiency. Analysis of feedback showed that among users who did not find what they wanted, some 18 per cent were looking for country-specific information, 13 per cent for general information on the United Nations, 12 per cent were looking for documents or treaties, and 6.5 per cent were seeking employment with the Organization. Most of the respondents were students. The feedback confirmed that many users utilize highly generic search terms, as well as abbreviated words and misspellings, all of which have an adverse impact on search results.

25. On the basis of the review, a number of measures are being taken to help improve the search experience. A feedback page is available in all official languages of the United Nations. Key matches have been created in order to position web pages that are more likely to be requested for specific types of queries, as a form of "canned search". Similarly, synonyms have been created to assist in the retrieval of popular items that are difficult to spell. News focus pages have been created on the United Nations News Centre in an effort to consolidate types of content and create one-stop searches for similar types of information.

C. Raising awareness

26. Improving the understanding of key United Nations issues among target audiences worldwide, as a means of generating support for the Organization, is another key aspect of the Department of Public Information mission.

Guided tours

27. Similar to the non-governmental organization conference, guided tours designed to enhance public understanding of and support for the work of the Organization, present an opportunity to solicit feedback directly from the general public. A survey conducted last year revealed that 94 per cent of visitors stated their understanding of the United Nations had improved after taking the tour.

Additionally, respondents said that the quality of the tour was excellent, the tour guide was well informed, and that almost all visitors (98.5 per cent) would recommend the tour to others. A previous survey in 2002 had shown that 40 per cent of respondents felt that the tour offered too much information. As a result, the information provided by the guides was streamlined; consequently, 83 per cent of the respondents in the 2005 survey said that the information was "just right", while only one per cent felt that it was "too much". Furthermore, using the feedback received, the Department of Public Information has been advocating greater public access to the General Assembly and Security Council chambers. On the basis of the overall results, the Department continues, among other measures, the rigorous training of guides, including client skills and coaching to adapt the message to younger visitors, who constitute over 40 per cent of the audience.

Educational briefings by United Nations information centres

28. The network of United Nations information centres work to extend the outreach of the Department's activities around the world. The centres conducted surveys to ascertain the effectiveness of educational briefings in 2004 and 2005. A majority of respondents (85 per cent) said that the centres served as their main source of information on United Nations issues and that the information provided was not readily available elsewhere. They also noted that local language information materials were useful. Generally, respondents regarded briefing programmes as a positive and useful means of learning about the United Nations and international affairs, while indicating the need to improve materials on development issues, to make them more useful or user-friendly. Although the quality of the speakers was rated favourably overall, the Department should ensure that information centre staff at all levels are provided with the appropriate tools, training or coaching in this regard, given the central role that they play in communicating directly with the public.

"Unlearning intolerance" seminars

29. The educational series on the theme "Unlearning intolerance" was launched in 2004 by the Department in collaboration with United Nations system partners, from within existing resources, to raise awareness of intolerance and explore ways to promote respect and understanding among peoples. Webcast around the world, each of the four seminars organized to date have drawn an average of 400 participants. The importance of the issues for the media resulted in the appearance of over 550 articles in multiple languages. A survey of participants was conducted at all four seminars. Overall, 88 per cent of participants considered the seminar series useful and informative, and half of the participants thought that it was an effective forum for raising awareness about intolerance. On the basis of the continuous feedback from participants, the format of the seminars evolved to include fewer panels and panellists. Additionally, more time was allotted to question and answer sessions and audience networking.

United Nations Bookshop

30. Intended to raise the visibility of key United Nations issues while also promoting the unique products available at the United Nations Bookshop, the "Meet the author" series was launched in 2003. A stocktaking exercise to assess the effectiveness of the series revealed that on days when the events were held, sales

increased by 39 per cent and the volume of transactions was 27 per cent higher than on average days. The events also generated an increased awareness of the convenient accessibility of the Bookshop to visitors and staff, as shown by requests for future "Meet the author" events. However, the assessment found that turnout and increases in sales were not consistent for all the events reviewed. Therefore, a more detailed analysis of the sales records is needed in order to allow event organizers to make a more strategic selection of topics and authors. A survey is currently being planned for 2006 to elicit feedback on the effectiveness of promotions, the visibility of the Bookshop and the value of the in-store experience to customers.

Ten stories the world should hear more about

31. Public awareness of the scope of United Nations work depends, to a large degree, on the extent of media coverage. All too often, however, matters of vital international concern remain outside the media limelight, which tends to focus on a limited number of dramatic developments. In an effort to address this shortcoming in 2004, the Department developed an initiative that sought to capitalize on one of the media's own popular tools: a "top ten" list. The resulting project, "Ten stories the world should hear more about", aimed to stimulate media coverage of underreported issues of international importance and increase the effectiveness of the Department's media outreach efforts, in part by articulating news angles that would capture the media's attention and prompt journalists to pursue the story further.

32. Analysis of media coverage indicates that the initiative has the potential to reach wide audiences in different parts of the world, despite the regional and national variations in the volume and spread of coverage. The experience of the 2004 launch, for instance, demonstrated that major western wire services chose to ignore the event, thus reducing the chance of its coverage by local and regional outlets that rely on reports from, for example, Reuters or Associated Press. Nevertheless, despite the indifference of major news agencies, the project elicited interest from a diverse range of other media outlets, including specialized publications and broadcast programmes, as well as an array of websites, from educational institutions to non-governmental organizations and web logs (blogs). Among news agencies, the dispatches by the InterPress Service and the Congolese News Agency were picked up in a number of developing countries

33. On the basis of the first-year assessment, the Department made an effort to have United Nations information centres and United Nations agency representatives more actively involved in the subsequent launch. The planning of outreach activities also took into account the positive feedback from interviews by the head of the Department that helped to highlight the initiative in major media such as *The International Herald Tribune*, *The South China Morning Post*, PBS *NewsHour*, *CNN International*, *BBC World Service*, *Al-Jazeera* and *The Hindu*, with a subsequent ripple effect in other outlets, particularly on the Internet. "Ten stories" was featured on such major online players as Yahoo, which chose it as its "pick" of the month, and Infoplease.com, which listed condensed versions of six of what it called "the most compelling stories". According to feedback from 70 per cent of the United Nations system media focal points, the project served as a helpful promotional mechanism to highlight neglected issues. Furthermore, the initiative exemplified the centrality of cooperation among United Nations communicators for successful results: where cooperation was lacking, opportunities were lost, for example, in the

placement of opinion ("op-ed") articles. Finally, strengthened coordination with United Nations radio and television in developing related programming for broadcasters helped in further spreading the message.

D. Strategic communications

34. A primary goal of the Department is to devise effective communications strategies on priority issues, including through client orientation. In addition to targeted communications campaigns, the Department must respond to breaking news and current affairs, adapting its work programme as necessary.

Press centre in Amman: Iraq crisis

35. The evaluation of the Department's initiatives in response to the Iraq crisis and the activities of the press centre in Amman highlighted the importance of coordinated, timely messaging to the media, and of connectivity with the field in ensuring timely and relevant material, to maximize pick-up by media partners and other target audiences. The creation of the Iraq Inter-Agency Task Force ...as ensured the participation of political, humanitarian, legal and communications specialists in the development of a common public information strategy, which was instrumental in ensuring coherent and comprehensive messaging, for both direct media outreach and in generating guidelines for United Nations officials dealing with the media. These lessons fed into, and were strengthened by, the response to media criticism of the oil-for-food programme. The Department strengthened its rapid response capacity to identify and ensure replies to criticism in the media. A daily communications meeting is now held, bringing together officials from the Department, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General and his spokesman, and the relevant substantive offices, to agree on responses to issues in the media and to determine coherent messaging for key media initiatives, including media placement. Additional adjustments made by the Department included regularly produced guidance for those dealing with the media on key issues, and assisting in the coordinated placement of "op-ed" articles by the Secretary-General and various senior officials to further amplify the Organization's messaging on key issues.

36. The increased media interest in taking live feeds from the Amman press centre confirmed the value of material from the field for the rapidly expanding global news market. As a result, the Department responded to this by increasing the number of field trips of its staff, within existing resources. For example, teams of staff have covered the Sudan, the tsunami disaster relief effort, the Niger food crisis, Guatemala floods, and the earthquake in Pakistan, to provide unique footage, images and audio to broadcasters. By means of new technology, audio and visual material is sent back to Headquarters in real time for inclusion in daily news programming. In addition, a task force has been established with operational agencies and peacekeeping missions to encourage and deliver more material from the field, particularly video material.

Media monitoring and analysis

37. As part of its efforts to assess the effectiveness of its communications campaigns to promote priority issues, the Department of Public Information has significantly improved the way media monitoring and impact analysis of campaigns

is conducted. The more in-depth and results-based client reports now prepared by the Department have made a deep impression on a number of client offices. Examples of media monitoring and analysis projects undertaken by the Department included coverage of the 10-year review of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the World Summit on the Information Society and the 2005 World Summit. These studies showed that the Department has the capacity to influence media coverage, both in terms of favourability and pick-up. Even though the pick-up of key messages on priority themes is determined to a very large extent by external factors, the analysis showed that campaigns are able to attract favourable press coverage through message placement, the use of spokespersons and media outreach. Direct interaction with journalists was found to be the most effective way of increasing the chances of favourable coverage among articles in which messages were carried (on average 15 per cent more favourable). The coverage of issues was primarily neutral in tone (mostly news stories), with a small proportion (less than 10 per cent) equally positive and negative (opinion articles). Overall, the studies showed that proactive media outreach efforts by Department staff led to a decrease in negative media coverage.

E. Working with the media

38. The Organization's ability to bring about an effective impact necessitates the supply of logistical support, news products and other services to its pivotal intermediaries, particularly to the news media. Additionally, this entails initiating, developing and strengthening external partnerships.

1. Services to the media

Media briefings by United Nations information centres

39. Systematic surveys were conducted by the United Nations information centres to assess the utility of the information products and briefings programmes they provide to the media with a view to improving them. Surveys focused on the activities and products related to the report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change issued in 2004, the 2005 World Summit, and the Millennium Development Goals. With respect to print products, on average 77 per cent of media respondents stated that they were useful, 76 per cent said press releases were useful and 44 per cent used the press releases to write a story. The Secretary-General's "op-ed" articles were deemed useful by 66 per cent of respondents, while 54 per cent indicated that they were used to write a story. A briefing on the 2005 World Summit received the highest ratings by far (92 per cent). Overall, three quarters of respondents said that information provided by the United Nations information centre was not available elsewhere or that it was better than other sources. The lowest ratings were attributed to material on the Millennium Development Goals, primarily because respondents preferred more succinct information. The finding was also reflected in the media analysis of the 2005 World Summit, which found that for communications purposes, focusing on eight different Millennium Development Goals at one time might be too ambitious, reducing the likelihood of media coverage.

40. In general, it was clear that the media appreciated the material provided, though some expressed the view that press kits contained "too much information", and that something smaller and easier to digest would be welcome. That view was also reflected in the ratings cited, where brief, concise material highlighting the main points — such as one or two page press releases, fact sheets and executive summaries of reports — were deemed most useful. Other suggestions included making information more regional or country-specific and material available in local languages. Therefore, the Department of Public Information will provide brief, concise material well in advance, so that United Nations information centres can translate and print materials more easily and more cost effectively.

Press services

41. Survey results and regular interaction with clients confirm that the timely delivery of relevant material in appropriate formats is a key factor in maximizing the utility of press services to the media and delegates. Web-based text products — the news service, press releases, media alerts — achieved growing rates of utilization and/or expressions of satisfaction. Nearly 90 per cent of respondents found the daily media alert useful or very useful, with a number expressing appreciation for its availability and regular updating on the United Nations website. Nearly 60 per cent of recipients of the media alert rated the press releases useful or very useful, with the majority using them daily or almost daily. While 70 per cent of press releases were issued within two hours of a meeting's conclusion, the survey found that there was a need for even faster production of meetings coverage. A comprehensive survey will be conducted in 2006 to obtain a more complete picture of the use of press releases, with a view to further improvements to the product. Press releases in hard copy were not as useful to respondents; therefore, the Department will review that product further in order to decide whether there exists a viable means of cost savings in this regard. Respondents also commented on the usefulness of the Media Documents Centre and expressed great satisfaction with the helpfulness of its staff.

Networked interactive content access

42. In an effort to continuously improve the timeliness of its media products, the Department introduced networked interactive content access, a new system that provides a central photo retrieval resource for all internal users and a batch delivery system for selected wire agencies. A survey of the major photo news agencies showed full satisfaction with the quality and objectivity of United Nations photos. There is a conscious prioritization of work in the selection/ingestion of digital photos into the system so that the turnaround time of the news photos can be minimized. The timeliness of photo delivery continues to improve, with most news photographs delivered within three hours of an event. According to the survey results, clients would like delivery to be even faster. The full potential of the investment in the system will be realized when the front-end web application, offering searchable high-resolution images with detailed statistics of the download activities, is acquired.

2. Partnerships

43. The Department aims to establish new partnerships with media organizations worldwide, while maintaining the existing ones. Fostering a system of partnerships

is fundamental to the objective of allowing multiple target audiences access to United Nations communications.

International Television Programme Market

44. One avenue through which the Department of Public Information has made the most of partnerships is International Television Programme Market (MIP TV), the largest international television programming market in the industry in which over 12,000 representatives from the world's television programme providers participate. The crucial presence of the United Nations system at this event has raised the visibility of its "brand" to the world's media decision makers. The Organization's united presence at the event has allowed United Nations broadcasting professionals to reach the world's media in one place at one time. More exposure has resulted in an increase in distribution, as well as in co-production partnerships, many of which started at the event and have developed through regular follow-up. Two significant results from the presence of the United Nations at the market were the financing of a documentary on the United Nations entitled, "Workshop for Peace", and the International Emmy Awards for HIV/AIDS coverage.

45. The participation of the audio-visual components of the United Nations system under the leadership of the Department of Public Information has doubled every year since it first attended MIP TV in 2002, culminating in 2005, with the presence of 13 organizations and 30 representatives. The *AV e-news* subscriber base has grown from 100 recipients (solely United Nations broadcasters) to approximately 13,000 recipients.

Global Media AIDS Initiative

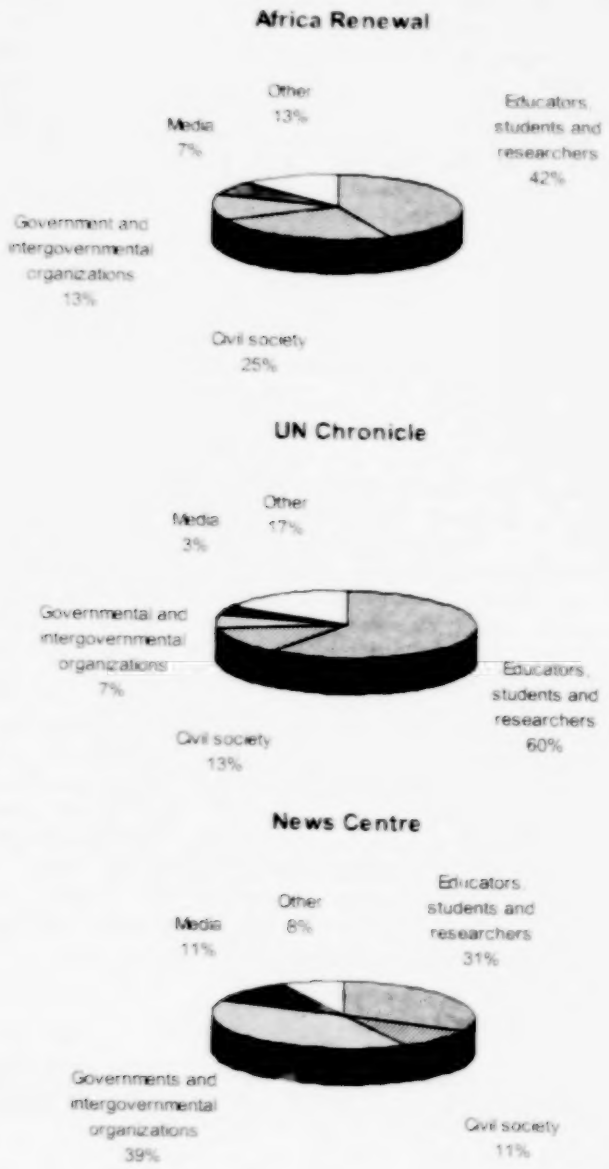
46. The Department of Public Information, in collaboration with the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Gates Foundation and UNAIDS played a critical role in the creation and evolution of the Global Media AIDS Initiative, by helping to organize its founding session at Headquarters in January 2004, hosting a brainstorming session with leading media companies at Headquarters in November 2004, and a second high-level meeting during the MIP TV convention in Cannes in April 2005. Efforts by the Department helped galvanize major broadcasters to increase their AIDS awareness initiatives, to collaborate more closely with each other and to make rights-free resources available to developing countries. The initiative has spawned regional and international collaboration, such as the Russian Media Partnership to Combat HIV/AIDS, an African Broadcast Media Partnership to Combat HIV/AIDS (representing broadcasters from more than 20 countries) and increased messaging by international broadcasters, such as MTV of Viacom. The partnership encompasses 131 companies from 62 countries carrying HIV-prevention messages, which were broadcast to a potential audience of 1.3 billion people. Praised as "unequalled in the history of public service broadcasting" in a major news outlet commentary, the initiative conveyed the message that public education through mass media could reduce HIV infection rates by two thirds.

F. Working with educators and youth

47. A primary aim of the Department is to use educational outreach to involve children and youth, in the issues and concerns of the United Nations. The

Department must engage the younger generation in the discussion of solutions to global problems, to stimulate opinion, debate and policy formulation through efforts targeted directly at the public, in collaboration with key educational partners. Innovative educational outreach is possible by drawing upon knowledge about diverse Department audiences (see Figure 7), thus allowing for increased understanding, meeting target audience needs and improving access to key audiences.

Figure 7



UN Chronicle

48. The *UN Chronicle*, which has been re-conceived as one of the Department's key vehicles for educational outreach, conducted a comprehensive cost-benefit review of its six-language editions with the assistance of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The purpose of the review was to compare the costs of the magazine's current production of print (all six official languages) and online (French and English) versions to the costs of a scenario in which the print versions were eliminated and online versions would be produced in all six official languages. The analysis also took into consideration that the English and French editions reach nearly 97 per cent of the magazine's worldwide readership, with the remaining 3 per cent divided among Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish readers. The English edition accounts for 72 per cent while the French edition comprises 25 per cent of all readers. Furthermore, the online readership of both the English and French editions has nearly doubled over the past two years. The review ascertained that the regional distribution and sales of the four co-published print editions of the magazine in Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish were not commensurate with the costs involved. Serious thought is being given to their discontinuation. The distribution and re-dissemination of the English and French language editions and contents in print and online, however, have been successful, with article citations, online reprints and article page views showing growth and outreach, in particular to educators and students. The review concluded that the cost of producing online versions of the magazine in all six official languages, despite the projected benefit of enhancing the reach of the languages version currently available only in print, would exceed the cost of its current production. The review underlines the importance of supporting multilingualism with adequate resources in order to provide readers in all official languages with equal access to the Department's flagship publication.

UN Works

49. Originally designed as a documentary series for cable television in order to attract a younger audience, the "What's going on?" series featured the stories of ordinary people who benefited from the work of the United Nations. After the series received the American Library Association's "Most notable video for young adults" award, the Department began promoting it among teachers groups as a programme aimed at educators and non-governmental organizations dealing with educational topics. Given that classroom curricula generally do not include international topics, a need existed to create a competitive and valuable product that would encourage teachers to discuss global issues. It has been commended by teachers as a means of sensitizing youth in the developed world about youth in the developing world, allowing students to grow culturally and globally. After the initial launch of the series, feedback from teachers and educational groups stressed the need for complementary tools, such as lesson plans and worksheets, to make the series easier to use in the classroom. In response to their feedback, a companion website was set up and other educational outreach products are currently being developed in collaboration with the distributor of the series.

NGO annual conference

50. Further to the surveys of participants in the Department of Public Information/non-governmental organization annual conference (see para. 22), the Department received additional feedback from non-governmental organization representatives requesting that participation of youth organizations and individuals throughout the annual conference process be increased. At the 2005 conference, a conscious effort was made to encourage the input of younger members of non-governmental organizations in the design of the conference, the interactive website and its maintenance, the selection of speakers and the conference summaries. In addition, young people participated in the plenary session and in the midday interactive workshops, three of which were oriented towards issues affecting them. The Department plans to continue to involve young people in its annual conferences.

G. Coordination and client orientation

51. Internal coordination and client orientation are central goals of the Department's work insofar as they provide the basis for the Department to develop more effective United Nations communication strategies. Internal coordination demands that synergies be enhanced within the Department, with client departments and United Nations system partners. In addition to the client planning process on communications outreach activities, the Department provides an array of other services to United Nations system offices.

United Nations Communications Group

52. Established on a weekly inter-agency coordinating meeting initiated at Headquarters in 1998 by the current Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Public Information, the United Nations Communications Group was formed by the heads of information of United Nations system agencies, funds and programmes in 2002. Its utility as a coordinating body is demonstrated by its growing membership, which has increased by 35 per cent since its inception, and by its rising ratings: in 2005, eight in 10 members stated that the Group made an important contribution to their communications work, compared to 75 per cent in 2003.

53. The United Nations Communications Group continues to maximize coordination on communications activities in order to minimize duplicate and competing media outreach events. Although a system-wide calendar of media events has reduced the number of overlapping activities, longer lead times in planning events would guarantee preferred dates for every outreach activity without disrupting or postponing other events. Coordination enhancements include regular summaries of consultations with senior officials and discussions at weekly meetings and the annual conference, which are issued as communication policy guidelines to all Group members. The summaries enable the United Nations to "speak with one voice" by providing factual, to-the-point guidance on communications issues affecting the Organization as a whole.

Client orientation

54. Collaboration through the client planning process has become a cornerstone of the Department's mission to strategically communicate the activities and concerns of the Organization in order to achieve the greatest public impact. The client planning process has produced effective communications strategies and greater interdepartmental coordination. It has been instrumental in fostering a culture of communication among substantive departments, which have recognized that their activities can benefit from including communications in their planning process and which clearly appreciate the added value of Department services. As a result of regular exchanges between Department focal points and their counterparts, mutual confidence has grown, constructive feedback is consistently received, and a consensus has emerged on the importance of identifying thematic communication priorities and developing more focused messaging. Further efforts are now needed to streamline the number and type of issues to be promoted and thus optimize the use of limited resources.

55. Surveys show that 75 per cent of clients are fully satisfied at the end of communication campaigns with regard to strategies, information materials, media outreach and overall collaboration with the Department of Public Information. Measuring client satisfaction has been helpful in institutionalizing the planning process and facilitating ongoing dialogue between the Department and its clients; however, some refinements to the method of collecting feedback still need to be implemented. By definition, client satisfaction provides only an indirect indication of the effectiveness of communication campaigns. The Department is therefore moving towards greater emphasis on evaluation techniques, such as media analysis and direct surveys of target audiences.

Graphic design services

56. The Department's graphic design services are charged with creating visual products for communications purposes. In order to improve the quality and efficiency of these services and to determine their competitive value, a survey of over 200 clients was conducted. Respondents rated graphic design services highly, a positive indication of coherent decision-making and communication between the unit and clients. Survey results showed that most clients (86 per cent) were satisfied with the final product. Over 90 per cent of clients expressed satisfaction with the designers and indicated that they would work with the same designer again. The Department learned that more than half of the clients would pay for services "if charged a nominal fee", which the Department is considering exploring to maintain high quality standards through the ongoing acquisition of advanced design software.

Library services

57. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library facilitates access to timely and up-to-date information materials and services for use by delegates, permanent missions of Member States, the Secretariat, researchers and depository libraries worldwide. With the objective of improving user services, the Library has used surveys to gather feedback from its users on the level and speed of access to information. The 2005 survey indicates that there is a large number of potential Library users who may still be unaware of the full range of its resources; nevertheless, the satisfaction rate among users remains very high, with over 92 per cent of them expressing

satisfaction with the Library's materials and services. The Library has demonstrated its responsiveness by overhauling its website, inviting external service providers to training programmes and publicizing training programmes more widely. Additionally, the Library has redefined its role in order to help permanent missions and staff deal with a large volume of information and constantly changing technologies through direct support services as part of a knowledge management initiative. This new initiative is one of the ways in which the Library has worked to increase its responsiveness to user needs.

Personal knowledge management

58. Launched as a pilot programme, the knowledge management initiative included selective outreach to United Nations staff in order to identify clients' information needs and provide personalized training programmes. A survey of participants in the pilot programme revealed that 90 per cent considered it a useful initiative, and that, 8 in 10 would recommend to others. On the training they received, one quarter of participants were educated in information resources previously unknown to them, while another quarter acquired advanced knowledge of tools used everyday, 60 per cent said it contributed positively to their daily work. The evaluation indicated that a more focused approach was needed to target user groups more systematically and ensure rapid follow-up. Based on this initial feedback, the Library is further refining its programme before making it available to a wider user base.

Daily press clippings

59. The Department monitors world news on a daily basis and provides press clippings to United Nations officials. Beginning in July 2004, the original paper-based clippings service has been replaced by a database-driven e-mail delivery system. Since the system's launch, the productivity of the service has tripled with respect to volume of clippings and number of subscribers, resulting in annual savings of approximately $16,000. In one survey, 98 per cent of subscribers praised the timeliness of the revamped clippings service, 80 per cent found the service easy to use, 75 per cent stated that the coverage of news topics had improved. Based on the feedback from subscribers, the electronic database will be upgraded and new features added.

VII. Conclusion

60. The public perception of the United Nations, like the image of any public institution, is the sum total of views held in the public mind. In the past two years, the picture in many people's minds of the United Nations has acquired a negative cast, reflecting the way in which the Organization has been portrayed in the international media. Public opinion polling results and media studies have shown the correlation between an awareness of negative news on the United Nations and poor ratings of the Organization, whereas slightly more favourable opinions correspond with lower levels of negative press coverage (Zogby America, February 2005; Better World Campaign, October 2005).

61. A number of polls conducted in the past two years show that support for the Organization, and understanding about its global role have faltered around the

world, particularly in countries in which negative media coverage has been prominent. However, polls also show that most people around the world want a United Nations that is stronger and more capable of living up to their expectations. Furthermore, global polling data confirm the public's belief that the Organization is central to solving world conflicts (Gallup "Voice of the People", October 2005; PIPA/Gallup in Africa, June 2005; Zogby America, May 2005).

62. While the image of the United Nations has been badly bruised largely owing to scandal-driven media coverage, the Organization is still regarded as an important public institution. As the communications arm of the Organization, the Department of Public Information seeks to focus the media on issues of concern to the United Nations. Though the Department has no illusions about its capacity to counteract much of the negative coverage of the Organization, it has reinforced its media outreach capacity to better tell the United Nations story, to respond to criticism and to promote awareness of the Organization's achievements in other areas. As a result, the Department has been able, to some extent, to offset unfavourable media reports (for example, in a recent study of press coverage on the 2005 World Summit, the Department's global media outreach and other efforts to promote the Summit agenda helped to bring about favourable messages, which appeared in 20 per cent of the total press coverage).

63. It is clear that the Department of Public Information must consistently evaluate its programmes and activities on an ongoing basis in order to cope with, and adapt to, the challenges of a rapidly changing international context. The Department's senior managers now understand that assessing the impact of the effectiveness of United Nations communications activities is not an option, but rather the foundation for remaining responsive to the needs of worldwide audiences. Without effective evaluation, there cannot be effective communication. The efforts described above will therefore continue beyond the successful conclusion of the three-year review.